

Mini Project: 'Collaborative Article on Social Networking among Mauritian Students Population'



There are hundreds of Social Networking Sites, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. While their key technological features are fairly consistent, the cultures that emerge around Social Networking Sites are varied.

Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing.

Social network sites as web-based services allow individuals to

- construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
- view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

In Mauritius, just like in other countries, Social networking is gaining momentum and is becoming increasingly common in our society.

Here you will get an overview of how social networking sites are weaving their ways in the lives of students' population and how are they affecting the Mauritian students population and why...

Team Members

Our team

Our team has been created to write a short article on Social Networking among the Mauritian student population. It comprises of 7 members. Here is a short introduction of our team members working in collaboration in this Mini Project:

Deepa



Hi, I am Deepa Bundhoo of MGI and am currently doing my MSc Educational Technologies from the University of Mauritius.

Nimla



Hello, I am a chemistry Educator at Gaetan Raynal State College situated in Quatre Bornes.

Reshma



I am an educator teaching Computer Studies in a state secondary school.

Welcome to **Social Networking** among Mauritian Students Population by Team A
Why have social networking sites gained such a momentum in Mauritius?

Sarita



I'm a Textile Engineer and currently working at the Department of Textile Technology, University of Mauritius.

Smita



Hello, I am a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Medicine at the University of Mauritius

Soobhadrah



I am an Educator in a private secondary school and I teach English Language, Literature in English and General Paper. I am currently following an M.Sc in Educational Technologies [\[1\]](#) at the University of Mauritius [\[2\]](#).

Youshra



I have a background in Computing and IS and I am presently Research Assistant at the VCILT (*Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies*) - University of Mauritius.

Introduction

Social Networking is in fact a new term but not a new concept. Social networking exists since the old age through physical gatherings involving groups of persons with similar interests or commonalities. People used to exchange business cards and related details. Among the student population, social networking took the form of going out among friends, meeting for group work by students of different or same institutions and through the exchange of phone numbers. Taking things a step further, social networking existed through the concept of '*penfriends*'.

In the digital era, social networking became a technology-enabled commodity, accessible to the digital natives and a luxury for those who can afford the costs of living in cyberspace but also an inhibitor to the inferiority or superiority complex that some people would have when they physically network in a social setting.

Social networking existing in the web 1.0 era mainly through chat based systems like IRC and in the web 2.0 era through interactive sites like **facebook** and **blogs** where persistent traces of interactions are kept. Indeed with globalisation and the emergence of **www** and the growing accessibility of the information superhighway, Mauritian students are greatly influenced by this new fashionable fabric of the digital society.

Social networking in itself can be a good concept but can be as bad as the so-called '*peer pressure*' phenomenon that young adolescents face; a phenomenon that was once, and is still 'cauchemardesque' for many parents. Well, in that sense, nothing has really changed but indeed the accessibility to the so-called peer pressure phenomenon is much easier than ever.

Mauritian students especially young adults/adolescents are not aware of concepts of data protection yet, issues that can be to the detriment of their fundamentals rights to privacy, and other related issues that can have a negative social impact on their future life, and the pace that they adopt the social networking approach is frightening.

On the other hand, education can be and is still the key. Just as sex education in schools had been a taboo subject for long in our educational system and this has caused quite some turbulences in our society, a lack of education related to the living online can be a problem in the future.

Social networking can also be beneficial for the Mauritian student in the sense that sites like **Google**, **YouTube**, and **Twitter** amongst others can be of high educational added value when used in the form of a community of practice.

The important thing nowadays would be the appropriate weighing of the for and the against and the ability to reach a socially acceptable compromise for the social networking culture that has always existed in limited form but which has expanded in a borderless unlimited field of action.

The Educational Sector in Mauritius

The education system in Mauritius is mostly based on the British system since Mauritius was a former British colony. The educational sector in Mauritius can be divided into four main categories namely:

1. Pre-primary,
2. Primary,
3. Secondary and
4. Tertiary education.

Pre-Primary Education

Pre-primary education starts at the age of 3 years and is provided by both government and private aided schools.

Primary Education

Primary Education starts at the age of 6 years and in order to complete the primary education one needs to pass a national examination; the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE). The government runs the majority of the schools and the rest are under the administration of the Roman Catholic Education Authority, Hindu Education Authority and Private non-aided schools.

Secondary Education

The secondary sector is divided into secondary academic and pre-vocational schools. These are state administered schools or private aided and non-aided schools. When students finish Form IV they need to take an O-level examination. After completing the O-level and Form VI (i.e. 7 years of study) students take part in A-level examination. Both O-level and A-level examinations are carried out by the University of Cambridge.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education consist of a wide range of institutions with different characteristics. The tertiary education also extends beyond the local tertiary institutions given that a significant number of Mauritian students either go overseas or resort to the open learning mode to pursue their studies. The tertiary sector in Mauritius consists mainly of these institutions:

- 2 Universities – [University of Mauritius](#) & [University of Technology, Mauritius](#)
- [Mauritius Institute of Education](#) (MIE)
- [Mahatma Gandhi Institution](#) (MGI)
- [Mauritius College of the Air](#) (MCA)
- Rabindranath Tagore Institute
- 2 Polytechnics – Swami Dayanand Institute & Institut Supérieur de Technologie
- Mauritius Institute of Health (under the Ministry of health)
- Industrial & Vocational Training Board
- Private Institutions / Regional Institutions: DCDM Business school, MALEM, Institut de la Francophonie, SSR Medical College, Mauras College of Dentistry

Table showing statistics for the Educational Sector in Mauritius for the Year 2008

Education Sector	No. of Institutions	No. of Students Enrolled
Pre-Primary	1,070	36,242
Primary	299	119,022
Secondary (academic& pre-vocational)	187	124,998
Tertiary	9 (local & public funded)	38,623

For the purpose of this article, the study will be focused on the secondary and tertiary sector only. Though some students in the primary sector are exposed to social networking most of them do not actively participate in social networking sites as compared to those students in the secondary and tertiary sector. Thus, this article will present an overview of the popularity of social networking among students and compare how secondary and tertiary students are using it. The students that will be considered will be those who are studying in any local institution secondary and tertiary.

Methods

A survey was carried out in order to gather necessary information regarding the popularity and the uses of Social Networking among Mauritian students. A sample population of 150 students (both from tertiary and secondary) were targeted to complete a semi-structured questionnaire for analysis; out of which 134 students responded.

Survey Questionnaire

We, a group of students of the course MSc Educational Technologies, University of Mauritius are surveying the use of social networking among Mauritian student population (tertiary and secondary). Grateful if you could kindly fill up this questionnaire for the survey. Rest assured that all information will solely be used for academic purposes and will be treated confidentially.

Thanking you in advance.

Please circle the appropriate answers; there may be multiple answers for some questions.

1. Age Group

- A. 13-20
 - B. 21-25
 - C. 26-30
 - D. 31-35
 - E. Over 35
-

2. Gender

- A. Male
 - B. Female
-

3. Where do you live?

- A. Urban
 - B. Rural
-

4. In which educational sector do you belong?

A. Secondary

B. Tertiary

5. How familiar are you with computers and Internet?

A. Expert

B. Comfortable

C. Novice

D. Not familiar at all

6. For what purpose do you use Internet?

A. Educational purposes

B. Entertainment purposes (gamming, downloading music)

C. Web surfing

D. Social networking

Others, please specify

7. Are you familiar with the term “Social Networking”?

A. Yes

B. No

8. If yes, do you have much interest in social networking?

A. Yes

B. No

9. If you don't use social networking sites, could you explain why?

- A. Don't know about these sites
- B. Not interested
- C. No Internet access
- D. Have concerns about these sites

Others, please specify

10. If you do use social networking, which sites do you prefer?

- A. Facebook
- B. Hi5
- C. YouTube
- D. MySpace

Others, please specify

11. Have you created your own profile online in any social networking website?

- A. Yes
 - B. No
-

12. If yes, on which social networking website (s)?

13. What is the main reason you joined a social networking site?

- A. It is an active and interesting community
- B. In order to follow the trend
- C. To voice out your opinions
- D. To keep in touch with other people

Others, please specify

14. Does your profile have restricted access or is it open for anyone to view?

15. How often do you visit social networking websites?

- A. Daily
- B. Weekly
- C. Monthly
- D. Very rarely

16. What are the different ways you use social networking sites?

- A. Stay in touch with friends
 - B. Educational discussions
 - C. Make new friends
 - D. For Flirting
- Others, please specify

17. How do you communicate with friends on social networking sites?

- A. Post message to friend's page
 - B. Post comments to friend's blog
 - C. Send group messages to all friends
 - D. Send private messages to friend within the social networking site
-

Welcome to **Social Networking** among Mauritian Students Population by Team A
Why have social networking sites gained such a momentum in Mauritius?

18. Do you feel that there can be potential danger in using social networking websites?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Never thought about it

19. If yes, what are your fears?

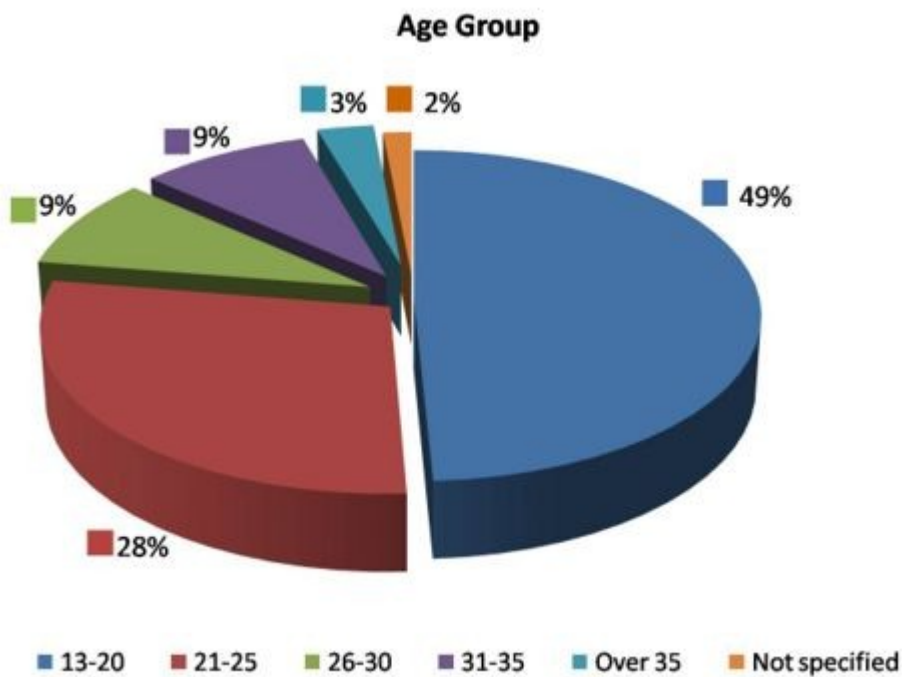
20. Those who use social networking, could you explain what contribution this has made to your life?

Thanking you for your collaboration.

Analysis

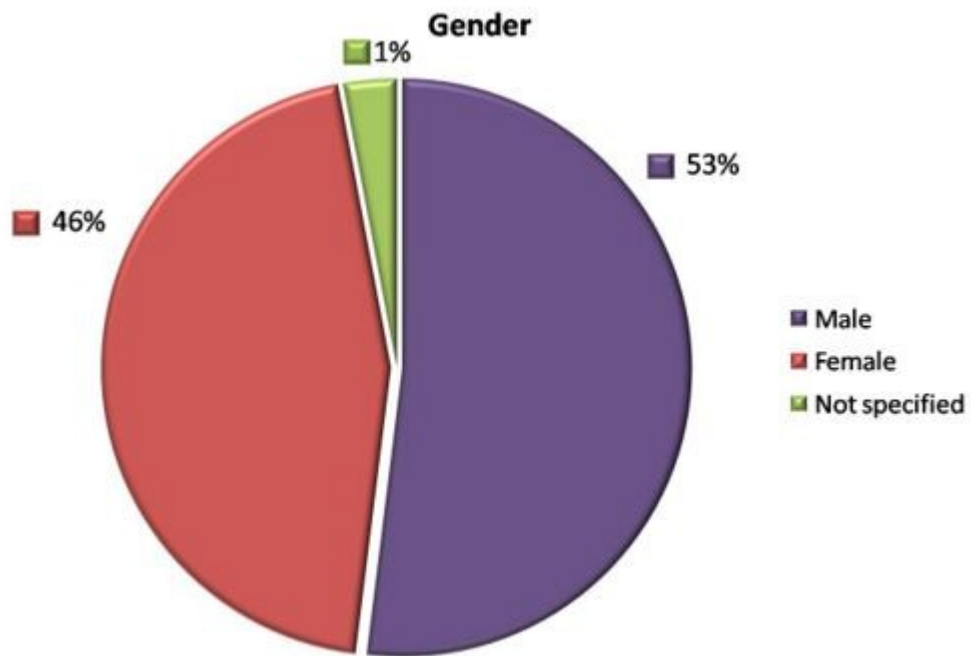
In regards to the [Questionnaire](#), the analysis of the respective questions mentioned, have been made here and they are graphically represented. This is mainly to give a proper illustration of our surveys made using quantitative research method. This allows us to measure or to quantify a whole range of things. For instance, the surveys have helped the varied responses to become numbers in the way they are analysed. Hence, this approach helps to enhance and deepen our understanding about different people from a wide range of age groups and their behaviour and thus, compiling these results in statistics and numbers.

Age Group



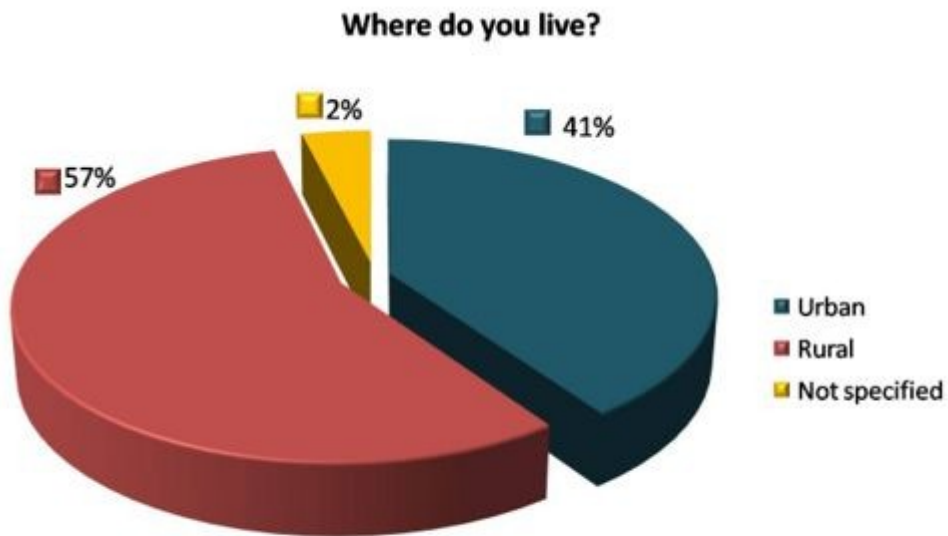
As seen by the above chart, it can be observed that there is a higher % of students in the age group 13-20 which use social networking sites. This is closely followed by a population in the age group 21-25 .

Gender



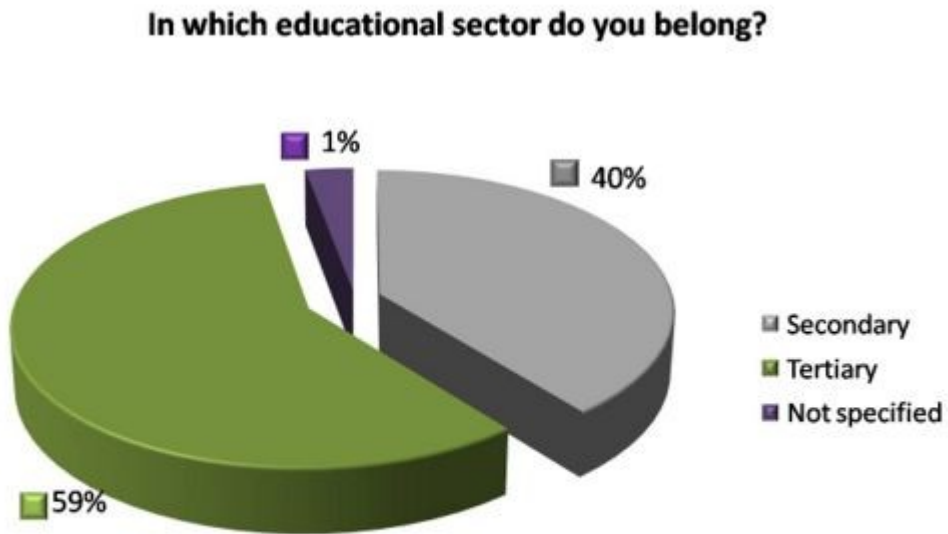
The survey shows that the male population uses social networking sites more than the female population.

Geographic Region



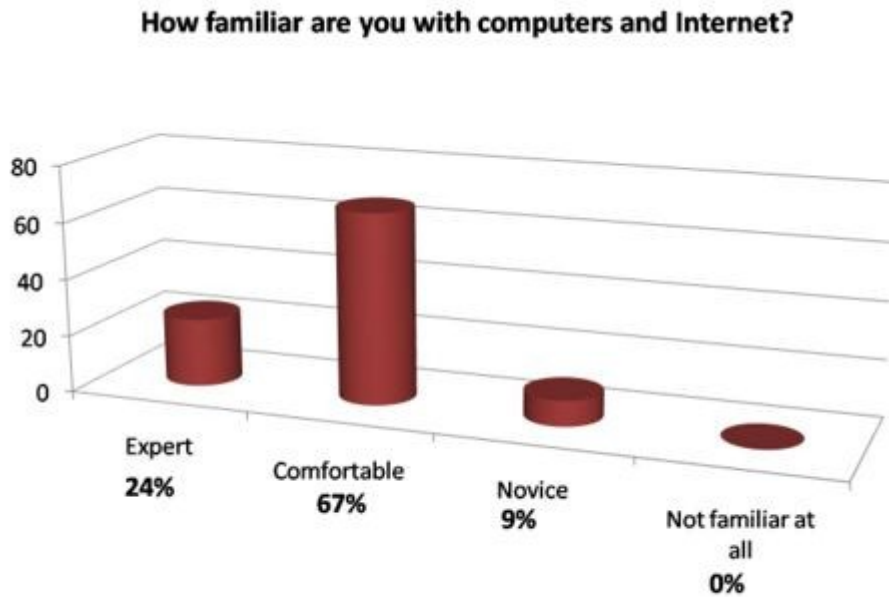
It seems that people living in rural areas use social networking sites more than those living in urban areas.

Educational Sector



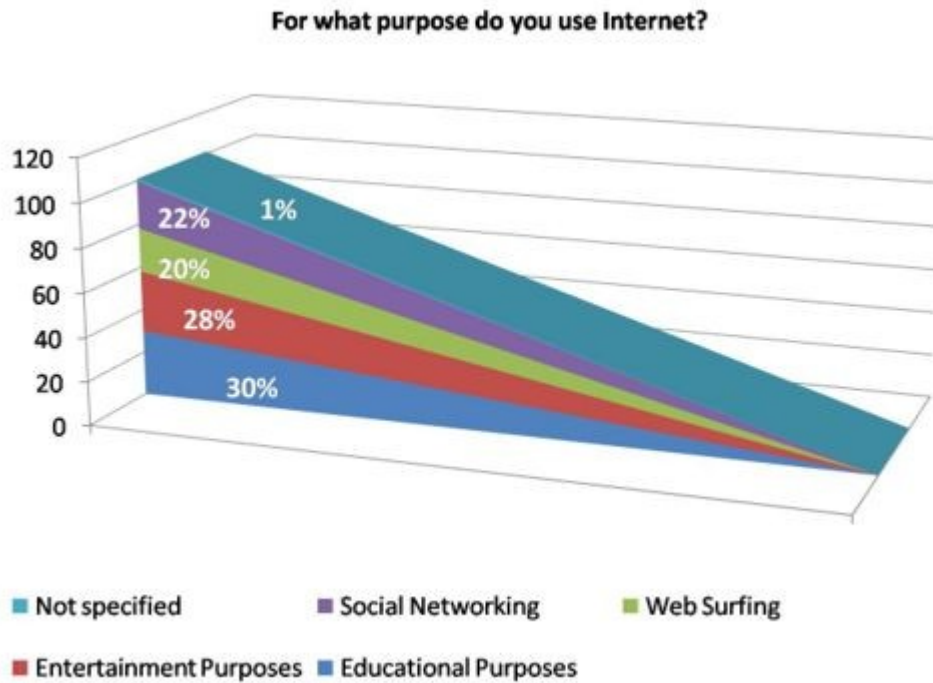
Students in the tertiary sector are more familiar and use social networking sites more than students in the secondary sector as shown by the above figures.

Familiarity with computers and internet



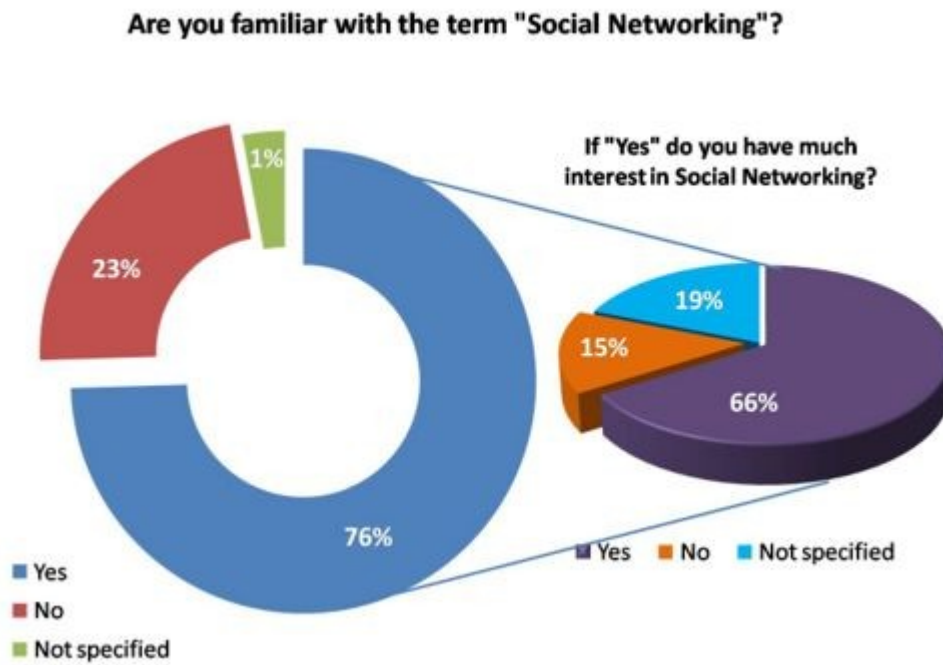
Most of the students are comfortable with the internet and its tools as shown by the 67%.
A small number are experts and only 9% are novice users. There is no one who is not familiar at all with computers and internet.

Purpose of use



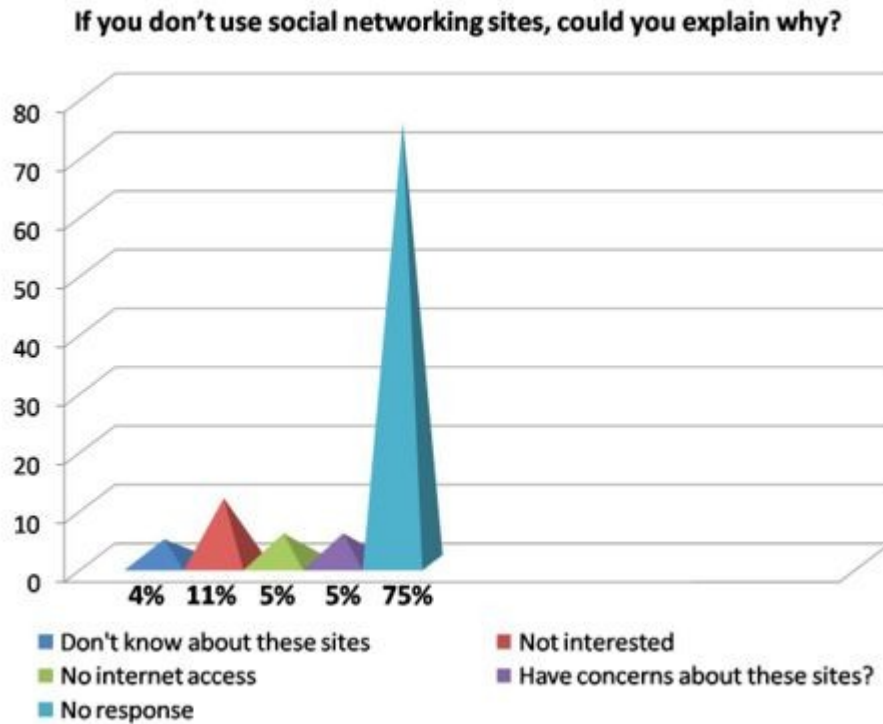
Most students use the internet for educational purposes as shown by the 30%. However, following closely with 28%, is the use of internet for entertainment purposes.

Knowledge and use of Social Networking



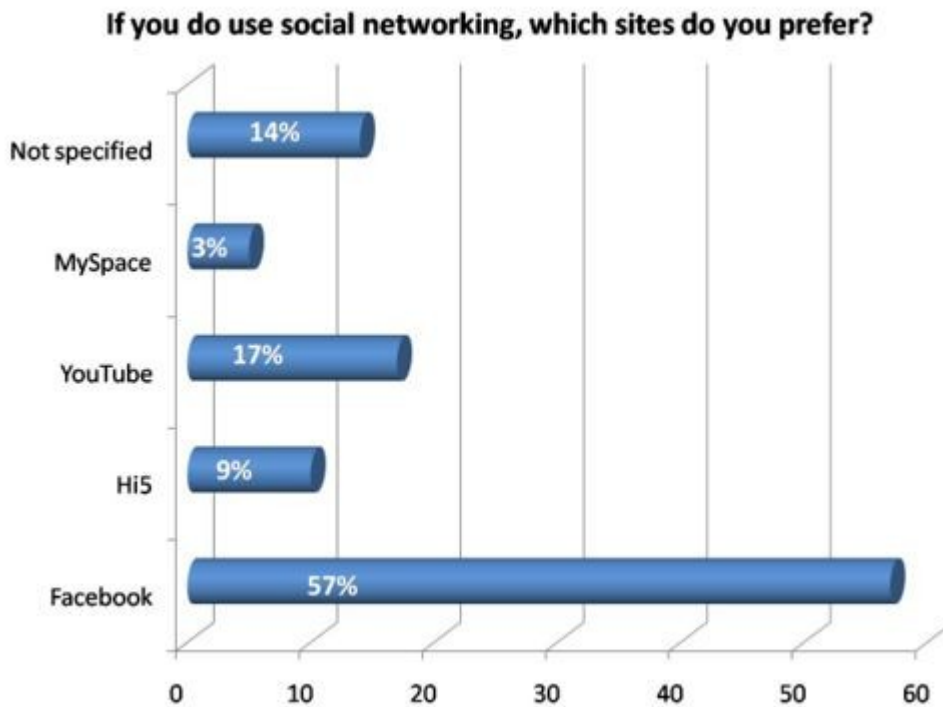
A large number of students are familiar with the term social networking and they are very interested in social networking sites.

Reason for not using social networking



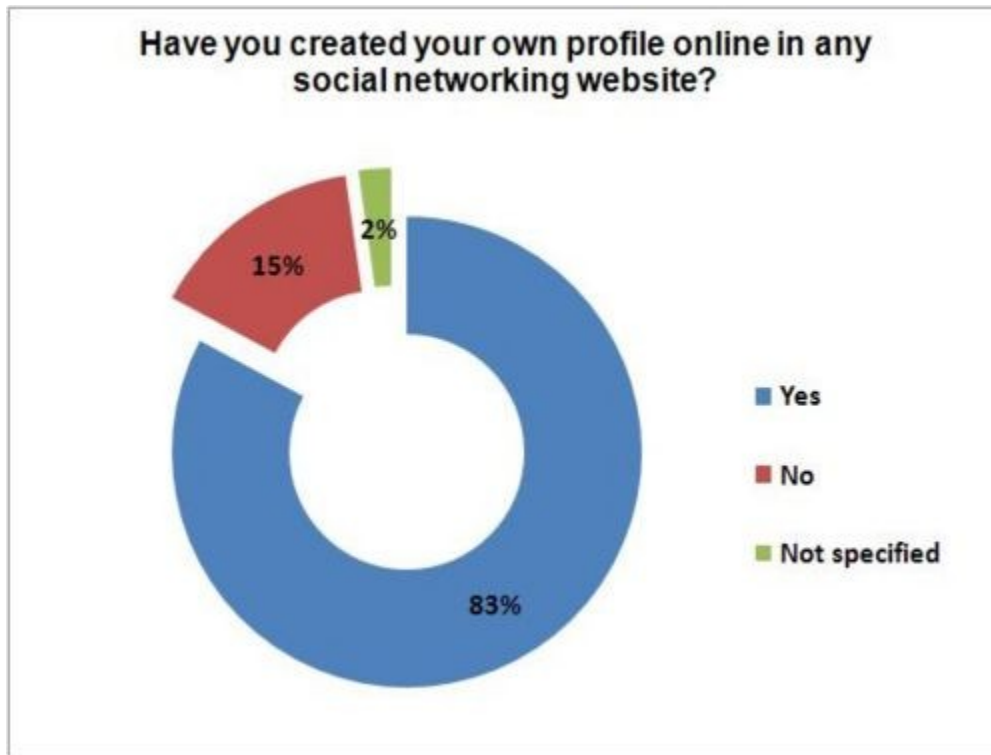
Although 75% of the student's population did not answer the question of why they did not use social networking sites, the majority of those who did answer stated that they were simply not interested.

Most popular site



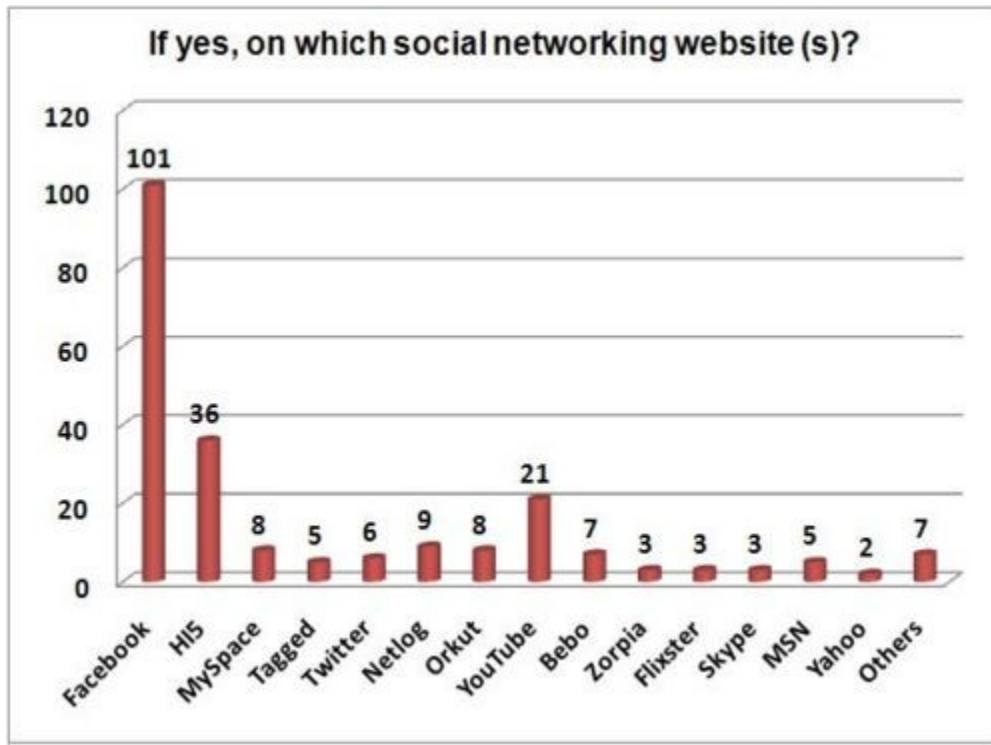
Facebook seems to be the most popular social networking site leaving the other sites a long way behind.

Profile



Most of the student's population has created their own profile on one or many social networking websites. 15% students do not have a profile online and 2% has not specified any.

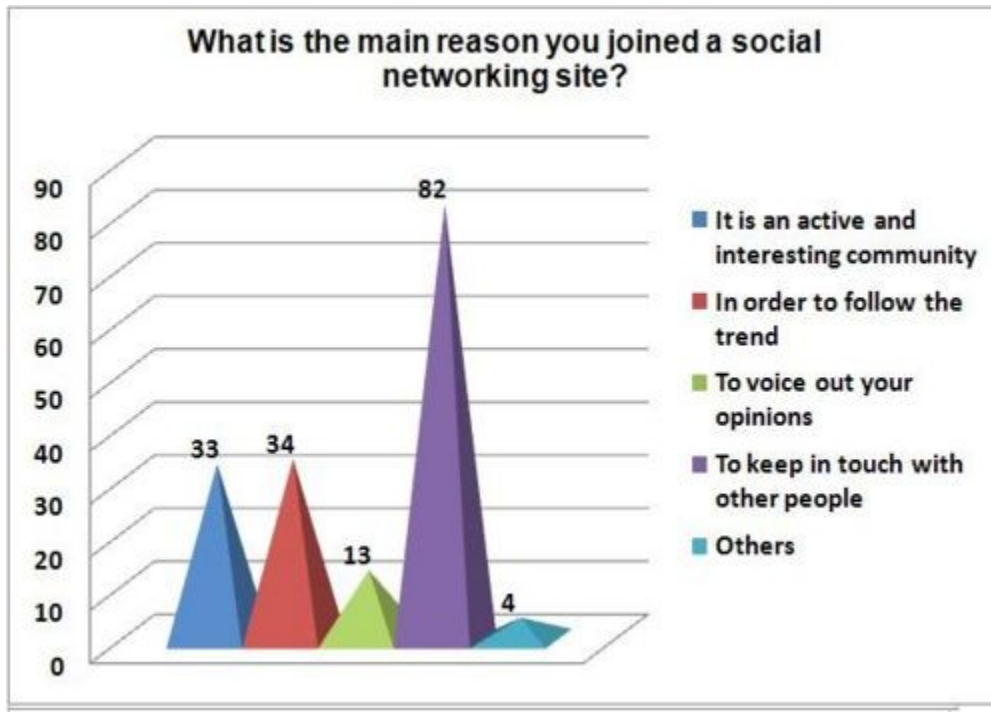
Social Networking websites



Many students have created their profile on more than one website but the most used one remains Facebook. Other popular ones are Hi5 and YouTube. The last item on the chart, i.e., 'Others' consists of the following websites:

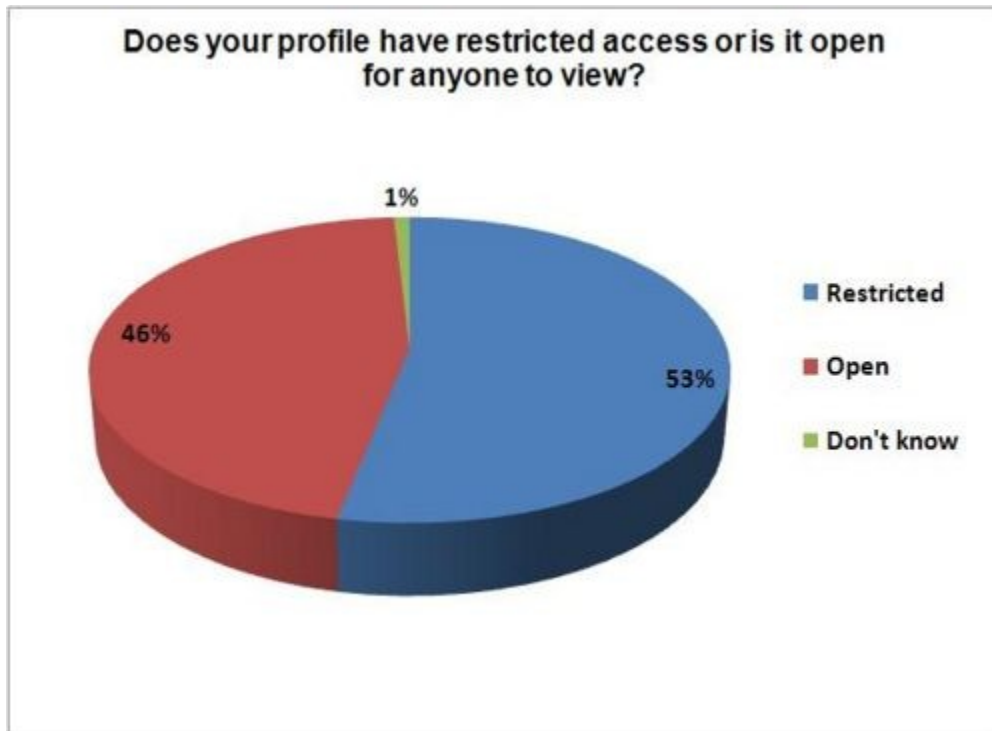
- LinkedIn
- Perfspot
- Shtyle.fm
- Infoscience.com
 - Forumw
 - Badoo
- Mauzik.mu

Main reason for joining a Social Networking site



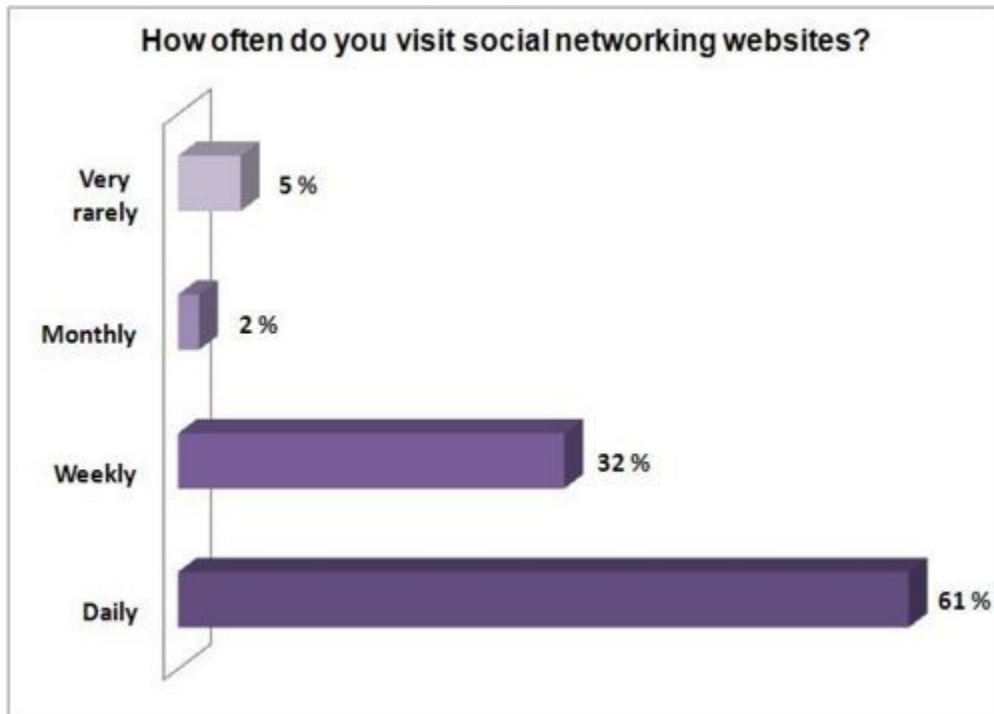
Many students have specified several answers for this question but most students stated that they joined a social networking website to keep in touch with other people.

Open or restricted access



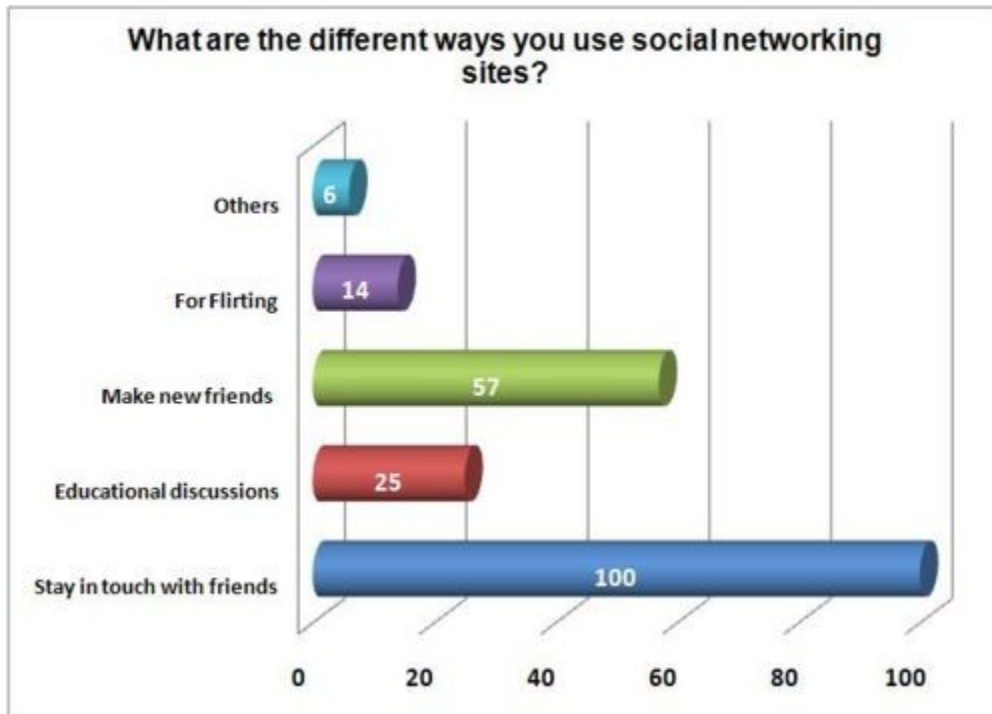
As shown in the charts above, 53% of the student's profile has restricted access while 46% has open access. Only 1% student don't know whether their profile are restricted or open.

Frequency of visiting Social Networking websites



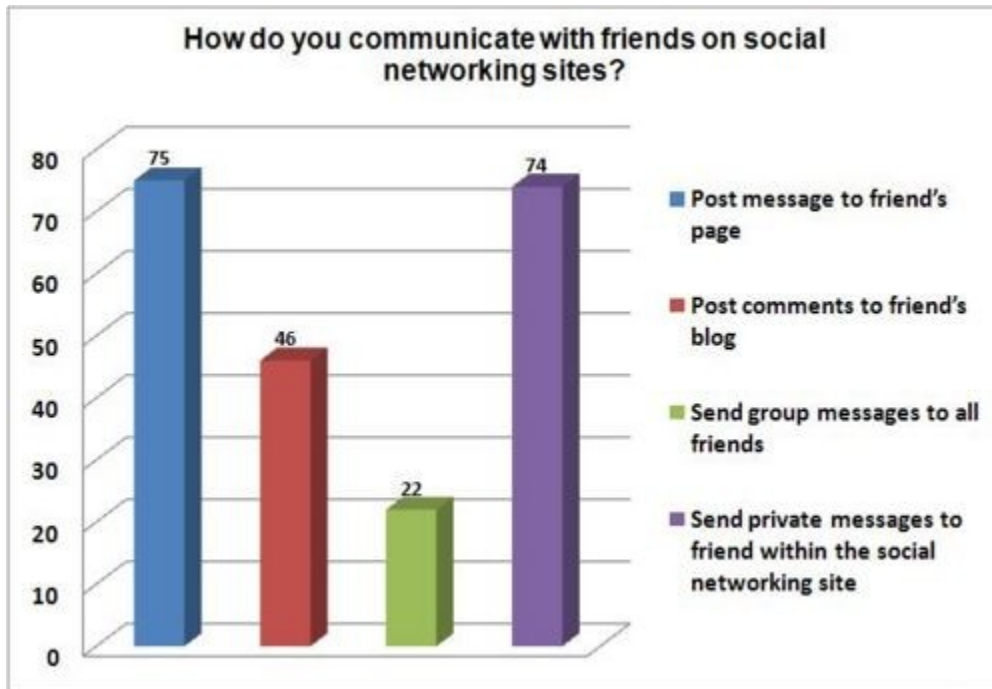
A large number of students visit social networking websites daily with 61%. 32% students visit weekly, 2% visit monthly and the remainder 5% visit very rarely.

Different ways of using Social Networking sites



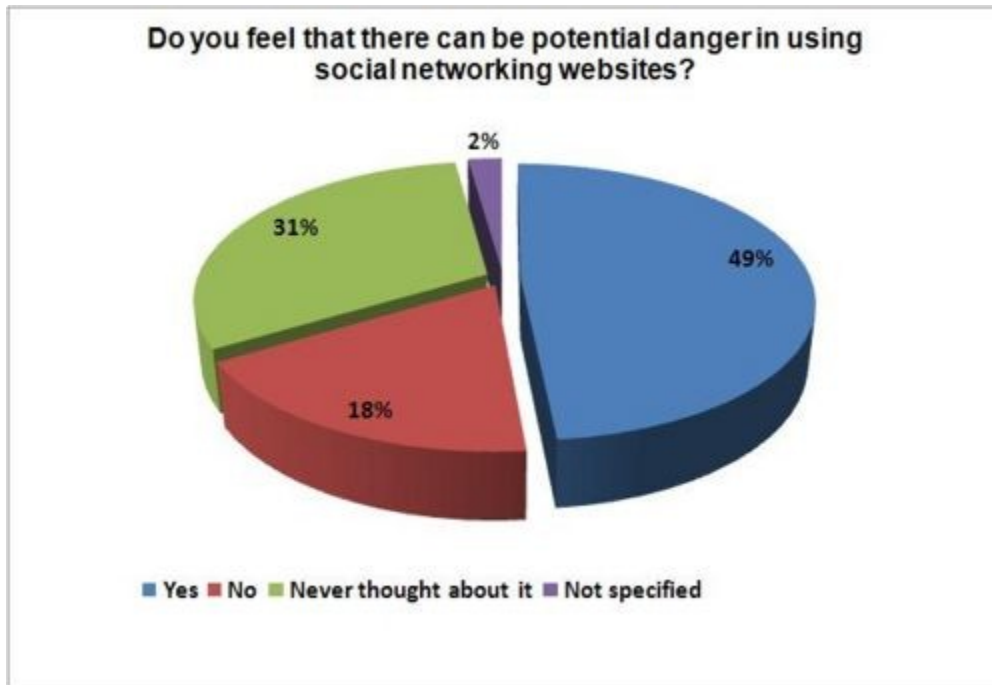
Here again many students have given more than one answer. Most of them use social networking sites to stay in touch with friends. Many also mentioned that they use them to make new friends. Some use it for educational purposes while others use it for less common reasons such as for flirting, out of curiosity or for fun.

Ways of communication



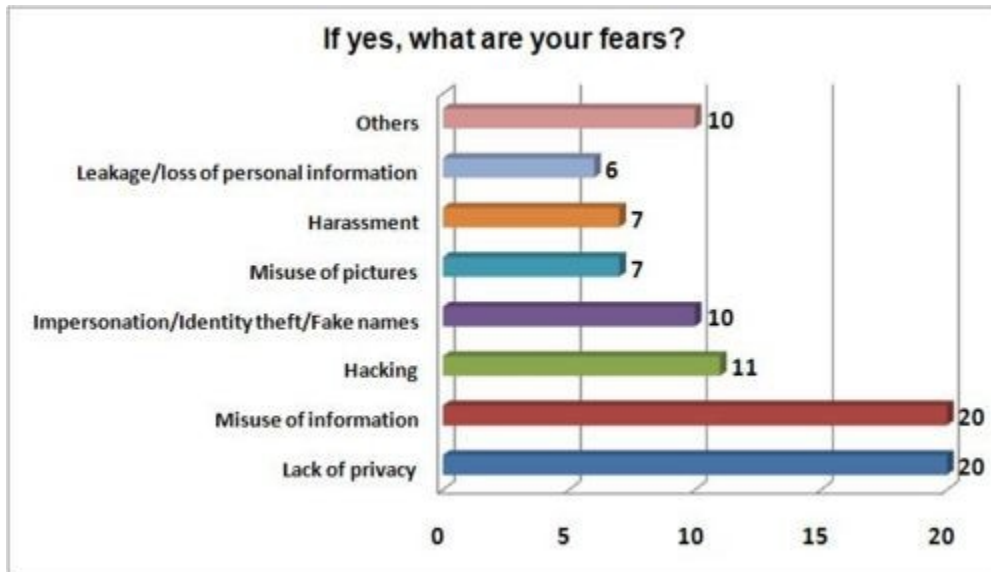
Two ways which most students use to communicate with friends on social networking sites are to post message to friend's page and to send private messages to friends within. The least used way is to send group messages to all friends.

Are Social Networking websites dangerous?



49% students think that there can be potential danger in using social networking websites while 18% believe that there is no danger. 31% never gave it a thought.

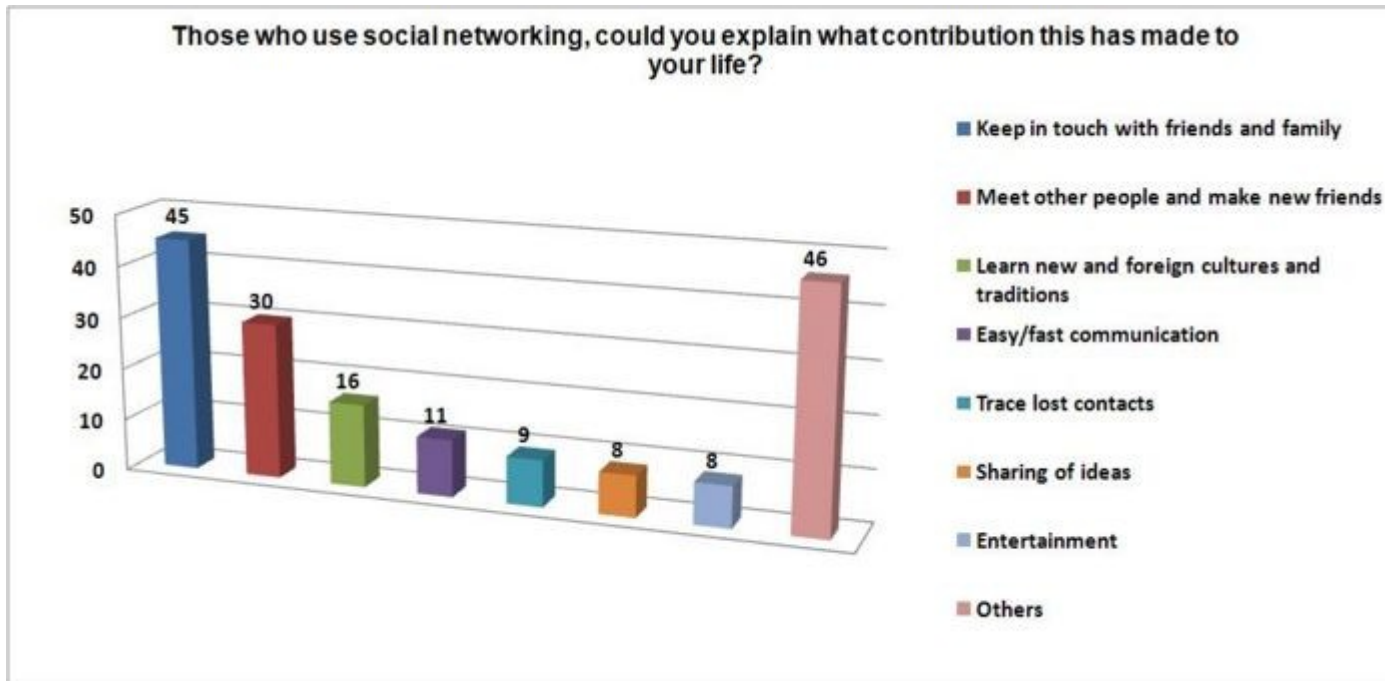
Potential dangers



The most common fears in using social networking websites are lack of privacy, misuse of information, hacking and identity theft. Other less common fears are harassment, misuse of picture and leakage/loss of personal information. Other dangers not shown in the chart are as follows:

- Virus
 - Post false information
 - Create conflicts
 - Spywares
 - Harmful comments
 - What happens to our information, photos when websites close down
 - Subject of gossip
 - Bad intentions
-

Contributions



Firstly social networking has enabled students to keep in touch with friends and family. Secondly it has allowed students to make new friends. There are other more contributions that social networking has made as shown in the above diagram. Other contributions not specified are as follows:

- Communicate with people around the globe
 - Socialising
- Less expensive to communicate with friends and family
 - Attractive
 - Educational purposes
 - Increase knowledge
 - Chat
 - Breaks monotony
- Share personal, working and educational experiences
 - View pictures and comments
 - Feeling of being connected
- Coach and stay in contact with students after school hours
 - Past time
 - Improvement in language
 - Learn to use internet better
 - Become popular

However few students mentioned that social networking has made no contributions to their life and one student says that it is a waste of time.

SN in Mauritius

Summary of Findings

This small study's aim was to shed light on the use of social networking sites by students of the secondary and tertiary sector.

Although the sampling technique was convenience sampling and thus the results cannot be extrapolated to the whole student communities, this study which was exploratory in nature does give rise to some interesting findings. 134 students participated in this study; 49% of this sample was in the 13-20 year old category and 49% was above 20 with 2% unspecified. Hence the sample did cover equally under 20s and over 20s. Similarly both genders were represented more or less equally (males 53% and females 46%). It is of note that 57% of the sample lived in rural areas whilst 41% of subjects were urban residents. This reflects the population of Mauritius where 43% of the population approximately live in urban areas and 57% approximately in rural areas. Thus we could infer that the sample does cover all elements of the student population to a large extent. However the tertiary sector was slightly overrepresented in the sample with 59% of respondents as compared to 40% from the secondary sector.

67% of respondents claimed that they were familiar with computers and internet whilst 24% claimed to be expert. This is good news for our educational sector which aims to be progressive and where there have been large investments in the IT sector. The internet was used for four main purposes: educational (30%), entertainment (28%), social networking (22%) and websurfing (20%).

76% of the sample were familiar with the term social networking with the majority (66%) claiming to be very interested in social networking although 15% were not interested in this at all. Of those not using social networking sites, the majority (75%) could not explain why this was so and 11% said that they were not interested in these sites. The most popular social networking site used was overwhelmingly Facebook (57%). Other sites included YouTube (17%), Hi5(9%) and MySpace (3%).

83% of the sample had created a profile online as opposed to 15% who had not done so, with 53% having a restricted access and 46% having an open access. 61% of the respondents visit their social networking site daily. The overwhelming majority of respondents in our study use the social networking site for staying in touch with their friends or for making new friends. Only 14% of our sample used social networking for flirting. The majority of Mauritian students stayed in touch by posting messages or sending private messages.

49% of our sample thought that there was a potential danger in using social networking sites with lack of privacy and misuse of information being foremost amongst their fears. This is interesting as 46 % of the sample still maintain open access despite these fears. The majority of our respondents felt that social networking had made a positive

contribution in their lives by allowing them to stay in touch with their friends and family, meet and make new friends and tracing lost contacts. There were some interesting contributions which social networking had made which included: learning foreign cultures and traditions, easy fast communication, sharing of ideas and entertainment.

In summary it appeared that the majority of our sample were familiar with social networking and used Facebook regularly for friendship and social purposes. Although 49% did have some concerns regarding potential dangers, 83% had an online profile and only 53% had a restricted access.

PROS AND CONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Referring to the value of social networking tools like Facebook, YouTube and so forth in Mauritius it can be honestly said that there are various things that the people like about social networking. First and foremost, it is a major plus for it allows the people to reconnect with the lost contacts. In brief, it has made it easier for the people to keep in touch with each other especially for those who have a very hectic and busy life. It is an advantage especially for those who love the idea of socialising with known as well as unknown people worldwide and of different backgrounds. It has promoted the sharing of advice and ideas from online friends that is, it allows for immediate reaction and response to ideas and issues. One example could be that the classmates or friends can discuss a school activity or assignment or project work or even conduct surveys, which saves both time and effort. Not to forget, despite we share some superficial aspects of life yet it also provides a way for sharing serious aspects of life too which can be both helpful and enjoyable. Last but not the least majority has said that they can reach others through messages by posting them. So, in short, it means that we can have news and give our support or offer our prayer that crosses the globe.

However, besides its pros we cannot forego its drawbacks. For instance, posting messages can be both pleasant but irritating to the users, especially if the user receives loads of messages thus it is most inconvenient to spend so much time to answer these messages (some of which may merely be just comments rather than part of a conversation). Some reasons are that they are perhaps too busy to do so and some interactions may be superficial thus there can be no limitations. In addition to it, responding to all messages can be very tedious. Some send incessant messages to promote their products, or inviting the people to join a certain event when actually it is impossible to do so or to join their “cause” and so on which can the persons feel boring.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier there is greater risk of identity theft and/or fraud. Some people may even try to do some illegal activities by making use of the users’ biographical or personal information. In one of the articles of a Mauritian newspaper, it was reported that there are many cases whereby the users can become easy prey -especially the younger ones or the naive, unsuspecting students- of criminals, predators and perverts. These people may stalk or harass the users online.

In a nutshell, it is crucial or imperative for the student population to know the pros and cons of social networking sites so that they can use them wisely by taking the necessary precautions otherwise the consequences may prove to be dangerous or can mar their life. In addition, they must think twice about the kind of people they trust while sharing some of their biographical or personal information. Of course, to what extent social networking sites are a potential danger to the users will remain controversial but, if the users are careful enough these powerful networking tools can make their life.

CONCLUSION

Pertaining to the analysis carried out, it can be deduced that social networking plays a major role in the life of the Mauritian student population. It is to be noted that majority of them belong to a population below the age of 20 and they are mostly from the rural areas and the tertiary sector while we have a higher percentage rate of the male population who are involved in social networking compared to the female population. It is imminent that many users have created an account a profile in one or more than one social networking sites for they find a great interest in these sites among which Facebook seems to be more popular or widely used.

Furthermore, while majority of the Mauritian student population uses the social networking sites to keep in touch with other people by either posting messages to the person's page or sending private messages to them, yet some have joined the social networking site merely to follow the trend. There is a scanty number of students who have not joined any social networking sites as they are not interested, or they do not have internet access or they are unaware about these sites.

Despite many have stipulated that social networking has contributed immensely in the life of majority of them like paving the way for easier communication to people worldwide, learning of new cultures or foreign languages, getting in touch with lost contacts, and so on yet, many are aware of the potential threats. Some of which are misuse of pictures, identity theft and/or fraud, being easily harassed by someone online, or vulgar or harmful comments may be posted or sent by strangers especially if the profile does not have any restricted access.

Referencing

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